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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored personal and program experiences that affect dissertation completion and non-completion to provide insights that might help students and faculty in their decision-making and advising. Interviews were conducted with 13 graduates and 9 "all-but-dissertation" (ABD) students regarding the traits they felt led to persistence or lack of persistence in their progress toward the doctoral degree. A structured interview form based on published studies of dissertation completion/non-completion was used. Participants felt that there was more structure and direction associated with courses than with the independent activity required to complete a dissertation. They described the need for self-motivation and self-direction as important attributes for successful completion of their degrees. Students recommended course work in dissertation proposal writing, support groups of students working on their dissertations, careful choice of advisors, persistence, good communication with their committee, and well managed allocation of time. Interview questions and responses are appended. (Contains 17 references.)(JLS)

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Dissertation Completers and Non-Completers: An Analysis of Psycho-Social Variables

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Dissertation Completers and Non-Completers: An Analysis of Psycho-Social Variables

The dissertation is a time-consuming, difficult challenge for many doctoral students. For some, the challenge is too great and the work is never completed. Failure at this high level is professionally and emotionally costly for the student, and is also distressing for faculty advisors and injurious to the standing of the institution. The personal investment in doctoral study is obvious, and universities invest considerable resources in small doctoral seminars, highly individualized advising, and supervision of independent research. While personal choice motivates some students to follow other paths, it is incumbent upon doctoral programs to select students with a reasonable chance of completion and to provide guidance throughout the process. The intent of this qualitative study was to explore personal and program experiences that affected dissertation completion and non-completion, and thus to provide insights that might help students and faculty in their decision-making and advising.

The literature presents us with a sketchy picture of the ABD as potentially more dependent, less persistent, and more inclined to procrastinate than the graduate (Green, in press). The ABD also reports feeling less responsible for task completion (Green & Kluever, 1995) and is more likely to be stymied when settling on a topic and an advisor (Lenz, in press). Hatley and Fiene (1995) describe ABD students as "pleading for more structure, opportunity, encouragement, and mentoring in their . . . professional lives" (p. 2). Students cite reasons for non-completion such as financial problems, changing interests, the demands of work and family, discontent with program orientation and advising, and personal concerns (Germeroth, 1991; Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connolly, 1983; Katz, Green, & Kluever 1995; Wagner, 1986). But the survey nature of the studies cited did not allow sufficient detail in response to the questions asked. Greater depth of response and detail was desired concerning student support systems, time management strategies employed, sources of financial support and management, knowledge of program requirements, relationships with faculty and other students, and sources found helpful for completing the dissertation.

Tinto's (1993) has formulated a longitudinal model of doctoral student persistence that includes the following factors: student attributes, entry goals and orientation, institutional and program

experiences, academic and social integration into a program, and research experiences. The latter factor was most salient here. Research experiences comprise opportunities during the program to become involved with faculty research or student research groups, faculty-advisor relationships, and financial support. Strong influences on this period are external commitments such as family, friends, and work. The current study was oriented to examination of the experiences of both graduates and ABDs. And, as both Tinto and Miller (1995) point out, models of persistence at the graduate level must include personality characteristics to effectively assess persistence. The literature has paid little attention to appraisal of the personality characteristics of doctoral students with the exception of minimal investigation of the characteristics listed earlier. The current study sought information from graduates and ABDs about what traits they felt led to persistence or trouble in their progress to the doctoral degree.

The Researchers

While each of the three authors reviewed the data independently, we share a common bias. We all believe that completion of the degree is a worthwhile pursuit, whether it leads to an academic career, a higher salary, and greater freedom in choice of work, or whether it does not. We believe some students will not finish, and should not. We believe writing a dissertation awakens interest in the work but also provides fruitful ground for reflection on one's own character. We bring to the analysis no specific theoretical perspective but do bring biases for viewing data in a reductionist (Kluever and Green) or synthetic, global manner (Katz).

The Interviewer

Interviews were conducted by the first author. The interviewer is in his mid-60s, a white male of trim build and of average height. His demeanor is warm, professional, and conveys caring and interest in the student or graduate. His approach is collegial. His attire is a light colored jacket with dark slacks and black shoes. The interview took place in several settings. One of those was a classroom in the College of Education; another was a faculty office; others were off-campus, and some graduates and students were interviewed by telephone. In-person interviews were tape recorded with the student/ graduate's permission. Participants were generally aware that Dr. Kluever was a long-time faculty member in school psychology at the University of Denver. In his presence, students and graduates may feel

compelled to think more reflectively than they otherwise might about their program. They may also be inclined to find more personal and fewer programmatic reasons for delays and inhibit criticism of the faculty. Dr. Kluever formerly directed the Graduate Office in the College, and has developed expertise in interviewing from his work in school psychology.

Method

The participants for this study were drawn from an urban private College of Education in a western state. This College enrolls primarily doctoral students with a minority of M.A. candidates and a few certification students. The sample included 22 subjects; 13 graduates and 9 students who had completed their doctoral final exams but not their dissertations. Participants were deliberately selected to represent all four concentration areas of the College and on-campus as well as off-campus programs within concentration areas and gender categories. The authors identified graduates and students who could be located and who were perceived to cover a broad range of experiences and topics. That is, a pool of individuals was selected who had progressed both smoothly and with great difficulty. The first author completed the final selection of interviews without consultation with the remaining authors. There were 16 females and 6 males in the study which is representative of the female/male proportions in the College. Most of the participants were drawn from the original subject pool of the Katz et al. study (1994) and from currently enrolled students who had not yet completed their dissertations. Tables 1, 2, and 3 describe the sample.

The 22 participants were selected from a pool of 42 nominees to represent current College enrollment patterns as closely as possible in concentration area of study, gender, on-campus/off-campus program participation, and student/graduate ratios. Participants were contacted by letter with an invitation to participate in a structured interview to gather data for this study. A postcard was enclosed for them to indicate their willingness to participate (22) or their inability to take part at this time (2). Some postcards were not returned (13) and some letters returned with wrong addresses (5). Those who indicated a willingness to participate in the interview were contacted by phone for an appointment and were interviewed on campus or by phone if they lived some distance from the university. Most of the interviews were tape recorded. Exceptions were hand written notes recorded by the interviewer for 5 of

the phone interviews. Participants knew when their conversation was being recorded and gave their permission for it. Tapes were erased after transcription and references to specific persons or organizations were deleted as stated in the agreement signed by participants. Hence, two of the authors did not know the identity of the interviewees when they analyzed the 22 transcribed protocols.

The statements in the structured interview form were based on published studies of dissertation completion/non-completion and on previous work of the authors (Katz et al., 1994,1995). These statements were prepared by the authors and reviewed by another faculty member who is familiar with university student characteristics. Statements used with students differed only slightly from those used with graduates in terms of verb tense and previous experiences with the dissertation process. These statements are presented in Appendix A. The interview tape recordings were transcribed by the interviewer within a day or two after completion of each interview. Hand written notes were taken of telephone interviews. Often, the telephone interviews moved along rather quickly and additional details that were recalled from these interviews were added to the handwritten notes to form a more complete description of that conversation immediately after the discussion with the participant had been completed.

The heading of each transcription included an ID number of the participant, their gender, concentration area, date of the interview, and whether they were a graduate or student. Only the interviewer knew the actual identity of each participant. Personal descriptions of each participant were not included since they would possibly reveal the identity of that individual.

Analysis of the data was carried out by the authors. After the transcriptions were completed, they were disassembled to include all 22 responses to question 1 on a separate page(s), then all 22 responses to question 2 on a separate page(s) until all questions were organized to facilitate review of each question separately from all 22 interviewees. Each of the authors analyzed the statements independently and then combined them for the final results section. Interpretations of the three reviewers were quite consistent and the few discrepancies were negotiated . A summary of the results of this study was sent to each of the 22 participants, in accord with the promise made before the interviews were begun.

Results

This section includes a summary of the 22 individuals' responses to each question followed by verbatim quotes from some of the participants that reflect the highlights or general themes of each interview question. Comments that were repetitious of previous ones were not restated. See Appendix A for a complete list of all of the interview questions.

Question 1

The responses of all 22 participants to the initial question, "How did you view the dissertation process and how was it different from taking courses?" was summarized as follows.

- **Courses are more structured with a narrowly defined content, a known beginning and end, and with an instructor prescribed outcome. There is regularly scheduled instructor contact. The dissertation requires great independence, self direction, and personal motivation. Contact with one's advisor and committee is at arranged intervals. Some participants described the process as freedom to explore and to set person goals and timelines whereas others described it as a set of confusing requirements and hurdles to be overcome.**

A graduate commented that, " The course work was very concrete and you knew what you had to do to get through and complete it and culminate it with the comprehensive exam. And then upon moving into the dissertation phase it was just me and my computer. . . . but the stark reality of just sitting there with a task of such magnitude was really incredible." A student who was at the beginning stages of the process commented that, "The process of taking classes is progressive. . . . you know what to do and what the structure is. . . . the proposal is very different. You are on your own. There is no structure per se and for some of us who are not terribly self structured it is difficult." Another student commented that, "Courses are very prescribed and clear in terms of what the process is in general, and even the most confusing course is never as confusing as the dissertation process." A graduate found, "the dissertation process quite interesting since in courses . . . . I didn't have an opportunity to explore something that was coming out of my own domain of interest and when I defined the question, I figured out where to go with it, how to approach it and my advisor was important in encouraging me." Another graduate indicated that, "The

structure is very different. In classes you have a beginning and an end but in the dissertation nobody imposes structure on you. You establish your own time line and it is up to you to finish." Another graduate stated that, "The major difference was the level of independence that operates with the dissertation as opposed to classes." Another graduate indicated that the difference was that, "the dissertation is a completely autonomous endeavor and it is because you are completely on your own and in classes you are almost held by the hand." And another commented that, "the personal motivation and personal organization is the key between the two."

Question 1b

Participants were also asked, "How did course work facilitate work on your dissertation?" Their responses were summarized as follows.

- **Most of the respondents suggested that the research and design courses along with the statistics courses were most applicable to the dissertation process. Some students mentioned courses from their major field as providing the content basis for their study and a few thought that course work had minimal if any relevance to the process of completing the dissertation. Often, these latter individuals reported previous experience that was more applicable to the process or that they just weren't ready for the material when the applicable courses were taught.**

A student commented, "I feel like I had a pretty good background in the basics of research. I had some exposure to that even prior to graduate school." A graduate said, "Yes and no. Certain courses absolutely and my cognate was research methods and statistics where I was able to learn this." Another graduate commented that, "I had a course on dissertation preparation. It was a good course with videos and handouts. The course on qualitative research methods was very helpful." A student who is beginning stated, "To be honest with you, not a lot." A graduate commented that, ". . . the first course that looked at different methodologies with a real broad overview of research and some of your responsibilities in terms of moving into the dissertation phase, the design possibilities. I think one of the assignments was to take a stab at a proposal. That was a frustrating experience. I ended up feeling tremendously inadequate looking in that and being nowhere near that point. There was a course that fell into place for me. I was

interested in doing a joint quantitative/qualitative design . . . . and there was this course that was taught at a retreat with follow-up . . . And he [the instructor] had just published a book where he compared the paradigms of quantitative and qualitative more or less simultaneously and in every other chapter. I would say that was the point at which I gained the real momentum to go into seriously getting the proposal underway. I went page by page through and digested his book three times while writing up my proposal." Another graduate commented that, "I think that probably the courses that I took that related to [my major] . That was an area of interest and I remember specifically some of the classes I took in that program that kind of guided me in that direction. So, I think those all helped give me the background."

Question 1c

Another question that participants were asked was, "What information did you have about preparing the dissertation before beginning work on it?" A summary of their responses is as follows.

- **Participants described a variety of approaches to understanding how to approach the dissertation. In general, the process they were about to begin was often described as lacking in clarity. Information about procedures was often gathered from other students or from graduates. Published university guidelines, courses on research methods and design, input from advisors, and previous research experience were sources that often provided direction. Some participants described dissertation support groups as being of value but others were reluctant to participate in them and questioned their value.**

A graduate commented, "About the process itself, I didn't know anything except what I was learning from my [group]. So, I knew pieces of it but I didn't know the exact process. Periodically, I guess, it was mentioned in my different classes or students would ask questions in some of my classes. . . . . so, I got it through osmosis." A student mentioned, "I think I had miscellaneous pieces, some from students, some from my advisor, some from other faculty, some from a class . . . . and some from the Graduate Office files. Some things I've seen on bulletin boards over at the Graduate Dean's office, some of which I wasn't sure applied to me but I wasn't absolutely sure. I still don't feel that I have a packet that tells me exactly each step to take. And if I hadn't talked to people who had just gone through it I probably

would have been even more discouraged in trying to find just where to grab hold of the tail." A graduate stated, "I had the basic questions for my study and I had done some preliminary research. In classes, I was told about chapters and I read other dissertations." Another graduate said, ". . . . gave me an outline verbally of what follows what and gave me a sample proposal. I read some dissertations and looked at a few other proposals. I took a qualitative research course and got some good information on how to write it up." Another indicated that , "there were a couple of short pieces that were in the research class that were descriptive of the dissertation. In addition to that, I was given a couple of dissertations and they were quite helpful and there were a couple of different handbook kinds of things that were produced at other universities that I was given by friends and so it was a combination of things." A graduate commented, "Very little, I don't think that that is the fault [of the program] although I am not sure. Actually, it was my fault and I don't know if I want to use the word fault. When I came into the program, I believe it is a course right now that may be required but that was not required for me to do a dissertation in [my area]." A graduate stated, " I think you fully understand what you are getting into. . . . . did speak to it, on occasion . . . came and spoke to one of the classes . . . . as far as OK what is a chapter 1 and what is chapter 2, etc. there is an idea, but as far as sitting down and saying okay, for your particular topic you need to do this and this so you need to consider all these different factors. That really didn't take place until you sat down with your advisor." And a student, just beginning stated, " Not too much. I think there was an overview from a class but there was no specific dissertation class per se."

Question 2

Participants were asked, "What were some of the major transition points for you as you progressed through the dissertation?"

- **A frequently reported transition was completion of an acceptable proposal after passing the doctoral exams and then beginning work on the dissertation. The stated difficulties encountered with preparation of a proposal involved just getting started writing the first page, identifying an acceptable problem for study after extensive reading and discussion, and conceptualizing and stating the problem in clear and appropriate terminology. Other transition**

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points noted were progressing through a proposal after a change of advisors, exploring and accepting a defensible path from a series of path analyses, and a change of job role.

A graduate commented, "It was just a grind! It is best to view it as just that with highlights and lowlights." Another said, ". . . . I was trying to get at a relatively volatile topic . . . and almost any word I was using early on was a triggering word. I was triggering emotionality and it was really through the debate period that we got to a descriptor . . . . which suddenly was the break through. That was the break point because it then took the emotionality out of it and began to allow a broader definition of it. That is, we put it into a different term." A graduate described the transition, " [after]. . . data was collected and ready to analyze and I met with my adviser for 6 months . . . playing with path analyses that fits and finally my rude awakening that I wanted to be finished before Christmas. What are we going to find or can we say in the dissertation that there isn't one path analysis that works for both because for 6 months we couldn't find one that would work for both so finally I said, 'this is it!' So, we took the path we started with that we originally thought would work for both and if it fits for one that is fine and if it doesn't fit for the other that is fine too so I finally had to come up with one that I could use for both so I was back to my original a priori and I could have saved 6 months of research if I had done that but I got caught up in playing with the statistics." A student indicated that the major transition was that "things began to come together, both of people who were willing to support me and give me information, the ending of a job and being a bit in limbo and I could let go of some major responsibilities and say that this is the point in time when it is time for me to finish it." A graduate stated that, "I think finding a topic and outlining chapter one was the major transition point for me." Another graduate indicated, "I think that the biggest turning point for me was that I changed jobs 2 years ago and I found myself in an environment of what I really wanted to do." And another stated that, " in talking with my colleagues . . . the greatest frustration is the very first transition that you are talking about is having an idea and molding that into an acceptable research topic." A student indicated that, "Probably the only major transition that I have been through so far was finding a topic that was exciting and went to the person that I had chosen as the chairperson and found out that it was a workable topic."

Question 3

Participants were asked, "What was the hardest part of the dissertation process for you? the easiest part?" Their responses are summarized below.

- **A frequently reported difficulty with the dissertation was initiating it. A few individuals had a researchable problem in mind before they began the dissertation but many had difficulty identifying a potential problem for study, developing the research questions, and preparing an acceptable proposal. The review of literature was also considered by many to be a difficult part of the process. Although many participants considered the writing of the dissertation to be one of the easier parts of the process, a few reported difficulties such as getting mixed messages concerning rewrites of chapter sections from different committee members and some questioned the need for what they considered an excessive number of rewrites. Finding enough time to work on the dissertation along with other responsibilities was also a problem as well as locating a sample of subjects for the study. For those living long distances from campus, the use of mail service for transmittal of chapters to committees and advisor was costly and time consuming. About half of the subjects considered running the statistical analyses as the easiest part of the process but others had difficulty with it. Some participants commented that collecting the data (surveys and interviews) was the easiest part. Analyzing qualitative data was reported as the most difficult.**

A student who is at the beginning stages of the dissertation commented that "There are three areas that have been very challenging for me. The first is managing my time. I find in my life that there are so many demands on that time. I am in a constant battle to take time, set it aside and use it to help me to finish the dissertation process. The second is that ____ is not always real supportive of me taking that time _____ feels like it robs of our relationship and doesn't know how my finishing the dissertation will help enrich it so _____ is not unsupportive and _____ tries to be supportive but is not at that point yet where _____ says, 'I understand that you need to take the next four week-ends in a row and bury yourself in this work.' And the third piece is just internal for me taking the time demands and taking the

relationship demands where I am constantly asking myself the question whether it is worth it knowing that I am taking from other parts of my life that are also important to me and investing them in a dissertation and I am always fighting with myself asking whether this is a life choice that I want to make and whether it will have pay off for me." A graduate indicated, ". . . . I think it was all difficult. Far more difficult than I anticipated and in reality the most difficult for me was handling the literature review and getting through the proposal. That seemed almost insurmountable to me and once I had done that, I had some relief that I could get it done. I felt like a contract had been written. The data collection was not easy but it was more routine. . . . I had my interviews with very out-spoken people, very ultra-conservative people and I had to prepare myself to maintain an unbiased position. . . . the writing of the work was one of the most fun things that I had ever done because it was nothing short of total creativity, analyzing the data and trying to figure out what it meant." Another student felt that, "The hardest part for me is getting the topic because I wasn't the type of student who came in with a burning question in mind and had to find this out because it was something that I always wanted to do. The easiest part? Interviewing? I don't know. I am not sure." A graduate commented in regard to the easiest part of the dissertation, "Running the statistics. I loved it. . . . . I had so much fun running all of that like finding where the weird numbers were. I was able to write my own program too and I would get these real bizarre results and it was because of how I scored certain things and so I learned so much about the process just cleaning up the data before I even got to what I was wanting to look at." Another graduate commented, "The hardest part was the revisions of it. . . . . I would give it to one professor to look at for revisions then they would say give it to another professor . . . . and they would come up with different ideas from the first one so then I gave it to the third one . . . that was on the committee and they would come up with something different and I was going around in circles with the revisions which was the hardest part. The easiest part was the orals. It was worth every minute of it." A graduated indicated that, "the hardest part was developing the proposal. The easiest part was the actual writing. I love writing and a committee member at the defense commented, 'I have to commend you, this is extremely well written'." A student who is in the process of finishing the dissertation felt that, ". . .the hardest part was being able to focus on a topic and a methodology that makes it doable and then being able to narrow it down. The easiest part?

It is hard to say. I hope it is the next step, the writing up of the results because I'll have something to work from." A graduate felt that the most difficult part was, ". . . getting to where you have the question. It is identifying the question. The easiest part? I loved the process: interviewing the people who had been the actors. They were the major players and it changed the whole course of history for the city." Another graduate commented that the hardest part was, ". . . the many rewrites and the time management. The many rewrites were a personal frustration and I had to persevere through it. I had to be assertive to committee members as to what was needed to satisfy them. The easiest part was working on the . . . topic." A student who is finishing the dissertation commented, the hardest part is going from the question to the proposal to the dissertation. The easiest part is doing the study because it is what I do in my classroom." A graduate felt that the hardest part was, ". . . transmittal of the dissertation chapters by mail at regular intervals. And as I got further along, the mailed packages got heavier and more expensive to mail. It was hard to do a dissertation by long distance. The easiest part was the support I got from the university. I could pursue my own style of study and it was OK to do that." Another graduate indicated that the easiest part was, " the oral exam, the defense. I guess that it is an opportunity to show off . . you know your stuff. The most frustrating part was trying to coordinate the different expectations of the dissertation . . . and trying to coordinate that among four different people. I think that it ended up a better product by doing that but it certainly required good communication skills and a good response to people's expectations."

Question 4

Participants were asked , "What do you think are some of your own personal characteristics that facilitated of hindered progress on the dissertation for you?" Their responses are summarized as follows.

- **Subjects stressed their personal commitment to the dissertation project. They often mentioned that they persisted on projects to the end, they had a strategy or path through the process, and they possessed a need for closure. They organized their time well and had identified a space to work. They often reported an intense interest and curiosity concerning their topic and had family support which provided the motivation to finish the dissertation. The most frequently**

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cited personal characteristic was called tenacity, determination, and consistency by different people. Being task-oriented, detail-oriented, realistic, well organized, and independent were also mentioned. Negative characteristics stated were procrastination, being scattered, and taking on too much.

A student just beginning the dissertation commented, "I have always been a pretty good self motivated person. If there is something that needs to be done, I can make myself do it. So, I am a good self starter which I think has helped. . . . So, what I did was I have been setting aside time when I work on the dissertation throughout the last year and that has been basically Friday afternoon and Saturday during the day. And having that time has really helped. I have a short attention span and I work in chunks and I may put 6 hours in but it will be broken up throughout the day. . . . I can be pretty focused during the 2 or 3 hours that I work and then I'll take a break and exercise or something like that.. It is not my favorite way to spend a Saturday, but it works." Another student who is also at the beginning stages of the dissertation process indicated that, "the barrier for me is that I take on too much and get too scattered. . . . I know that I am a better time manager now than I was in school and I was really juggling balls then." A graduate said, "I think it is personality. I do not have a 'sit back' personality. I never have been the kind of person who could sit back and let the world walk in front of me." Another graduate commented, "I am very detail oriented and, also, I finish what I start." A recent graduate suggested that, "what finally worked for me was that I had to get myself physically organized and . . . using my office as the place where I did my dissertation work over the summer. I had access to it over the summer and the computer was there and I just made it a 9 to 5 day everyday during the summer just like I was going to work. I just put it in my mind that this is just another part of my job . . . What has helped too was that in the early stages, I made it too much of it as an all or nothing project and thought that I had to give up everything else in my life and what I tried to do over the past year and a half was to make time to exercise and be with friends and I didn't have as much time as I usually do but I made sure that I still kept a balance and kept a perspective." Another graduate said, ". . . I tend to be goal oriented and I tend to be very organized and methodical." And another had a similar comment that, "I'm very detail oriented. And, also, I finish what I start." A student who was well along with the dissertation commented, "I had to

schedule time carefully. Because of my job, I had to allow time to not think about the dissertation. I decided to not think about the dissertation while I was at work or play. Sometime I wanted to .. . . but I knew I had to work on the dissertation. I had to carve out a niche to do it. The rest of the week I could attend to my work or enjoy doing some other things that I like. A graduate indicated that, "I could never have not finished. I never gave myself permission to not finish." And another stated, ". . . for me it was a personal goal and I am a very independent person in terms of my own personal accomplishments. . . . I have children and wanted to serve as role model for them." Another recent graduate recalled the, "tremendous amount of tenacity that I have. . . . I have always had a lot of that mainly to survive life and so this was the first time of using that particular characteristic in a real creative way that wasn't in a model, so I think that it is a part of me that makes me go forward with it just to get it done and I had a time line. A student explained that, ". . the first characteristic that I have and what I use is kind of a strategy to really get myself geared up is that I have a tremendous curiosity around this topic so I will intentionally get myself into this framework of just wanting to know answers or wanting to know more about the question and I can't describe it any more than that. It is a topic that just drives me in and of itself." Another student who is just beginning suggested that, "What is going to get me going is very firm support from the back side, my family."

Participants were then asked, "How did working on a dissertation affect your social life?" Their responses are summarized below.

Question 5a

- **Responses to the question of how working on one's dissertation affected one's social life varied. Some indicated that they had not pursued an active social life previously and found that working on a dissertation had a negligible if any effect on that part of their life. Others reported deliberately scheduling time for socializing along with allotted time for the dissertation. A few persons indicated that they informed acquaintances of their need to persevere on their study for the time being but that friends were not abandoned. Typically, friendships and social endeavors**

were maintained but on a less regular basis. Most people reported minimal long-term impact although two of them noted a significant effect.

A graduate commented, ". . . friendshipwise, things did not necessarily change. My best friend thought that it was a little silly that I was going back but she didn't think much of my going back for my masters either, so she said it was expected and didn't worry too much about it. Now, I have a lot of friends." Another graduate remarked, ". . . I am a very private person and it didn't change a whole lot with my friends." And, another commented, ". . . for one thing, I am pretty much a loner. That is one reason that I enjoyed this process. If you want to be going out all of the time and doing a lot of socializing then the dissertation may not be the thing to do." A student explained that, ". . . I just let people know what I am doing because I will get so involved in it. I let people who are important in my life know what I am doing so they know that I am not neglecting them or that I am not there for them but this is what I am doing and ask for their support." Another student stated, " It seems like we are working all of the time anyway and no we don't have a lot of social life. Not really." A student nearing completion of the dissertation commented that, ". . . I think that my social life has suffered somewhat in that I have been preoccupied with doing this project and that project and that is part of my whole scholarly and academic growth but family has not suffered I don't think." And another student thought that, ". . . it probably impacted social life but not too much. The biggest impact has been on my recreational time." Another student thought that, ". . . it is hard to distinguish what is from the dissertation and what is from school because I have been in school a long time and my social life has been disrupted. And that has been consistent like when I was taking courses there wasn't much social time and now the dissertation has taken that place. So, it is an on-going pattern and I can't say it has gotten any better or worse with the dissertation process." A graduate expressed that, " . . . when I entered the program I was pretty clear that I wished to maintain a life as well and not abandon everything. I don't think that earlier on that I would have had that ability at all to even be aware of that." Another said, "My spouse informed me that it had a significant impact on my social life for over 2 years."

Question 5b

Another question asked was , "Did your role as a scholar change anything in your relationship with others?" Participant's responses were summarized as follows.

- **Most participants reported that others showed greater recognition and respect. Some people also sensed some coolness on the part of their colleagues, as though they were threatened. There was a sense of differences from the pre-doctoral level.**

A student observed that, ". . . on a professional level . . . at a meeting I was asked what I was doing educationally and I told them I was completing a doctorate and there seemed to be a little more respect and there were questions about what I was doing and how I had gotten as far as I have so in some cases more respect and in others, people tend to be a little more aloof." A graduate found that, "my professional life was helped immensely because I had the credibility of the initials now and people actually pay attention to what I say now and it made a big difference there." Another graduate indicated that, ". . . at work, . . . I feel like there is more respect with my colleagues and for those who have their doctorate, I feel more secure in my setting . . . there are 5 of us and they are very much more respectful of what I did and I feel appreciated. And with parents . . . they ask what my doctorate is in . . . and they immediately talk differently and there seems to be a hidden respect in there. . . the superintendent has treated me differently. At graduation, all the faculty robes are the same but I have the doctoral robe with DU colors and so I am treated differently there too. And I would not trade it for the world." A student commented, "I think it has but it is a little embarrassing because people have told me that I don't strike them as a Ph.D. candidate. I don't know if that is a compliment or whatever." A graduate felt that, "My colleagues are all, they would like for me to not have done it or something. It gives me a status that they can not handle or know what to do with. Seriously, it was interesting to me that not one single person mentioned it when school started in fall. No one!" Another graduate felt that, "There may have been a certain amount of jealousy from others who did not finish and I've felt a sense of pride and self esteem." And another said, "I think certainly, people get a different perception of you as you're working on that type of topic. I think they look at you in a little different context from that regard."

Question 6

Participants were asked, "Describe the adaptations your family made while you were working on your dissertation." Their responses are summarized below.

- **Families were supportive through the dissertation process. Those with no children commented on the availability of time for them to pursue their study. Spouses were supportive and often assisted more often with daily chores and with minor activities associated with the dissertation. Time for family activities was tightly scheduled and not as extensive as in pre-dissertation days. Dissertation costs also impacted family activities. One comment was that there was not much differencé between coursework time demands and dissertation time demands.**

A graduate commented, "I don't have any children which helped, I think. But I do have children next door and they are there and it hurt them a lot when I was working on the dissertation because they really didn't know what it was . . . . and I said , 'well, we can't play today'." Another graduate stated that , "my children do not live with me. That is probably one of the reasons that I could do it. I was really clear that opportunity was such for me and I could take advantage of the opportunity." A student stated, "There were no real changes. I am alone and didn't have to make any adjustments." A graduate indicated, "I think my husband did more helping. He is a good helper." A student who was near the end of the dissertation process indicated that, "I have a supportive husband and I had support from my family. My father encouraged me to finish. . . . My husband did a lot of errands that helped and assisted with some of the projects that had to be done." A graduate commented that, "My children were very supportive of me even when they got sick and tired of me saying, 'I can't talk. I have to sit at the computer and no one can use it except me'. They were supportive but I think that toward the end they all got tired of my complaining and saying how I am going to finish this thing. . . and they knew I would." A graduate indicated, "Spending. . . . it isn't of course a nice benefit to have to have tuition when you're off campus. To me that is an impact. There are certainly sacrifices that family has to make as far as vacations and like going to movies and out to dinner when you are working on this chapter, or that chapter. So little changes take place." Another graduate describe how, "we had to be a little more

intentional about everything than we would otherwise have been. There was the need for me to remain on schedule . . . and keep random occurrences of life from happening very often and everything had to be very, very scheduled to accomplish things." A student indicated, " . . . my wife has known me since I have been in school so that is about all she has known which is probably a good thing. She'll be glad when it is over." And a graduate indicated, "There were some very definite challenges because obviously it takes a great deal of time and particularly when I was pushing to meet a deadline and this is where my spouse was very helpful." A student stated that , "I had to take a less demanding job, a less paying job, and that had repercussions on our long term finances. . . . so it has been primarily financial but I think it has also been helpful with the family since they feel a sense of pride." Another student indicated that, "Within my immediate family and also within my extended family or what I call my family, they have just been tremendously supportive, almost drivers."

Question 7

Another question pertained to the relationship with advisors and committees. The responses are summarized below.

- **Graduates and many students described a positive, supportive relationship with their advisor and committee. Some students commented on problems they experienced such as an individual having a series of advisors, all of whom left the university before the dissertation got under way, finding an advisor with an interest in and support of a particular topic, and a description of an advisor who criticized one in front of other students. Stress from both groups was on identifying a supportive advisor and committee and working well with them. A number of statements of appreciation for guidance, learning opportunities, and support from advisors were provided. Promptness at returning drafts was appreciated but requiring multiple drafts of chapters was viewed negatively. Participants noted the status differences from being in a class (adversarial, hierarchical) compared to working with faculty on a dissertation (a collegial relationship).**

A student who is nearly finished commented, " I had the best advisor anyone could have. The committee was helpful and supportive. I got drafts back in reasonable time and changed them as

requested. The hardest part is scheduling meetings with all the committee members. It would be helpful if there was someone on campus who could help to arrange specific days and times." Another commented, "My advisor and I have a mutual respect for each other. The committee was very helpful. The problem is that some faculty are off for the summer which is when teachers have the most time to work on their dissertation. But, my advisor returned calls fairly promptly and I progressed. Some advisors are more accessible than others but I had positive experiences with my committee and got drafts back promptly." Another student explained, "I was real careful to choose my committee with people I knew that I could work with. So, right off the bat, I picked people I knew would be cooperative and appropriate and challenging when they needed to be but also supportive. . . . My relationship with my primary advisor has been very business like, very matter of fact. . . . . Sometimes certain committee members seem to get hung up on things that are their own things that they are especially interested in. That is not helpful and it is really frustrating and it seems like more of a political agenda." A graduate felt the relationship was, ". . . much more collegial and if they were hard on me it was because they were collegial and it wasn't because it was hierarchical. I wanted to get through and the committee said, 'here is what you need to do' and they were very respectful." Another graduate felt that, "My advisor was more a friend and maybe a companion who had already done what I am doing. My advisor was busy and would call me back and leave a message on my voice mail and was good about letting me come right after school and I tried to pick the days when there were classes because my advisor would be there anyway." A recent graduate stated, "I had an excellent advisor who motivated me. And the committee was fine but I was slow in returning rewrites of chapters." Another graduate commented, "I worked with my advisor who demanded that it be right and then demanded again that it be right and about the 8th time that went on, the quality of the writing was substantially better and when I got to chapter 5, the ability to write in a style appropriate to the dissertation was well established so that went real fast." A student involved in dissertation preparation described a conversation with graduates who explained that, "faculty members gain power, gain status, and possibly gain credit for research and you will find that often advisors will lead you into building their academic record rather than necessarily helping you further what is of interest to you. And I had never really thought about the academic prestige or the power that comes out. What

students do you really help and how do you help them and what can they do for you? So, I felt much more aware of some possible issues involved in trying to work with a person or persons who protect their time and expertise in their work." And another student explained, "The advisor I had when I was taking courses was a very unfair person I think. There were derogatory comments made about my pursuit of the dissertation in front of groups and it was not called for. . . . I almost quit. . . . But since then I have been trying to come back and I have an advisor now that I can work with. It has been really hard to come back to school without feeling tense."

Question 8

Participants were asked, "What was involved financially in completing your dissertation/" A summary of their responses is noted below.

- **Support was obtained from loans, grants, assistantships, tuition waivers, personal savings, employer benefits, and full time jobs. Costs for the dissertation aside from tuition were estimated as from $800 to $5000. Costs for the dissertation were for postage, printing, envelopes, payment to subjects, editing, typing, transcribing, computers and printers. Major personal expenditures, i.e. vacations, auto were postponed.**

A graduate commented that, "My dissertation didn't cost me anything actually other than my own. . . . I got my data from my place of work. My costs were very minimal and for course work I just had the tuition costs which I am still paying off. In fact, I still have a loan that I am paying off, $8000 all together which is not bad and was all I had to borrow. And the rest I was able to pay for and every so often I got some extra tuition waivers and had some assistantships." Another explained that, "payment was made a little at a time and then I set aside $1000 for the dissertation. I knew this was going to be expensive so I did that. As I went along I kind of set money aside to do it. My spouse and I live in a house that is not completely finished . . . and tend to live in a rather frugal way. We live simply so others can simply live. So, monetarily, I think we lucked out." A recent graduate commented, "I used mainly my own resources. I had some computer assistance in analyzing the data. A major cost was printing and envelopes and postage, probably around $5000." A student who continues to work on the dissertation

said. "My tuition was paid, so there were no other huge costs. I collected my data in my classroom. Books I needed for references were expensive and . . . . I bought a computer and printer to do my writing. I had some incidental expenses . . . My time was another factor. There was quite a bit of time involved in everything but I am probably a slow worker. I think the total cost of everything including the computer and printer was about $3500 to $4000. A graduate commented that, "It was a financial strain on us. I paid for the education as we went and it meant we didn't have money left for vacations or a new car, etc." Another graduate explained, "Well, I am fairly lucky in that I had full tuition. . . . . All my travel was at my own expense to collect the data . . . . so I incurred some costs there. Luckily, my spouse has a good job and I was teaching full time and so financially . . . it did not impact me as it would if I was not married or in a divorced situation or in another situation where they were supporting themselves, etc. So, financially, it was not a burden." A student working on the dissertation stated, "I had to choose a topic that I could afford to do. An outcome study would have been nice but I didn't have 10 to 20 thousand dollars to spend to do something like that. . . . So, financial concerns dictated the kind of dissertation I did. At this point, there are costs along the way that are hard to absorb such as a couple hundred dollars here and a couple hundred there but I don't think it will total more than $1500. I had a GRA that paid for school so that didn't impact. Probably the biggest thing is that it takes time away from when I could be working and making money instead of being home writing. I haven't had costs for typing or loans, etc. I paid for it along the way. I already had loans from school and there is no way I could afford to go into more debt for a dissertation." Another student indicated, "I have been very fortunate in that so long as I am employed at ____ they paid all the tuition and the only thing that I have to pay for is the books. I think the indirect costs has been that there is always this third party called _____ company that is involved in decisions I make around crises that come up at work and that is stealing time away from the dissertation but I have to take care of work responsibilities or I risk losing my financial support. . . . so they are a contributor but they are also the third party that I must consider and there are time trade-offs. I set up a budget and I have an academic budget and I put money in that and that is how I buy books and how I fund going to conferences, seminars, etc. so I just fund that myself that way by putting a certain amount of money aside and that is what I use for what I call school expenses." A graduate explained, "In the entire program, I

had been employed full time . . . . at a substantial level . . . and that allowed me an ability to borrow on school loans. Without it, I couldn't possibly have done it because when I went into it and if I decided to work full time and go to school full time then I couldn't be starving full time. That was not an option. So, I had to remove that as a barrier. . . . . Of course, now, I am having to make some major adjustments in my life to assume repayment at a substantial level. It is coming at me like a boulder rolling down a hill. . . . . So, if I were to reflect back on the total part of it I think you have to live life while you are doing it."

Question 9a

Participants were asked to suggest "recommendations to a student just beginning doctoral study or just beginning the dissertation process." Their responses are summarized below.

- **The major recommendation to those just beginning the dissertation was to select a topic of great interest as early as possible, preferably well before course work is finished and develop the literature background through course work and papers. The importance of a supportive and interested committee and advisor was stressed. Maintaining direction, continuing progress, and avoiding distractions was noted. A timeline with goals and deadlines should be established but should allow for unanticipated delays.**

A student who has been working on the dissertation proposal suggested, "If I had to do it over again, . . . what I would recommend to others is to find a way to identify your area of interest as soon as you can, get real data as soon as you can and use your interest and your data to help integrate as much of the following course work as you can so that by the time you are even ready to write your dissertation proposal you already have it written as soon as you finish your classwork. It seems like every time you are writing papers for a class, you are updating a lit. review, updating your thinking, building more references and you are almost completely done and the second thing I would highly recommend is that as you are going through all this, who are the key individuals that can help you finish this dissertation. Who are the faculty that have an area of interest or expertise in our topic and then check them out. Talk with other dissertation students and graduates and ask them about their experiences with certain people so I think

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you are wiser and smarter about who you are targeting and to enlist their help." Another student commented, "I would tell then to really think it through. Do they want a degree so they can go to work? And they should really be thinking about goals. I need blocks of time for me to . . . think about it and I would advise somebody else to do the same thing, especially if they have a family. What are your days? Fridays and Saturdays? And what days are you going to be out the door and at the library? When do you need to be at work? Is part time an option? Can you take time off and do it? It is more of a question of how is this process really going to occur." A student beginning work on the dissertation proposal suggested that, "I think the Ph.D. is something which is not just a title. It is a lot of work and you really need to be committed and I am not sure from the very beginning that I was committed to a project that I knew was my own and so I would recommend to have something in mind before you really embark on it." A graduate suggested, ". . . make sure it is clear to them that they are organized. Make sure that they have a team, a committee that balances their weaknesses and to stay after it to keep the momentum. That is one of the reasons that I got into it so quickly because once you lose the momentum from the course work or just lose the discipline of being in the academic area, it is really easy to get distracted by family, it is really easy to get distracted by hobbies, etc. and you lose that momentum and once you lose it, it is tough to get it back." Another graduate commented, "Probably the biggest one is to anticipate more time than you planned and that it will probably take twice as long as you think it will and it is not so much your not being able to do it but there are so many other factors to take into consideration such as returning material to the protection of human subjects committee and it comes back and there are revisions to make and that is fine but then it takes several more weeks to get through the system again. . . . and there are people who are on vacation and people are out of town and I try to get people together for meetings and things like that . . . And, it is noone's fault, it is just that it will take more time than you think it will. So, you just need to plan for it. I would say that if it is possible, to make sure that you've got yourself in an environment . . . that supports you. I think that the support for me was that I finally got to the point where not only did my family support me but there was a work environment that supported me and other people that I needed and they were there when I needed it. It just kind of helped the motivation factor." Another graduate suggested, ". . . take a course or two and see what this is all about because I don't think

it is for everybody. I think that you have to be willing to really work hard and do a lot of reading and to be put under tension and stress which is the way it is when you take classes and that is not a criticism, it is a doctoral program and it needs to be intense and thorough." Another graduate recommended a way to get started is, ". . . just write it down, just write. And talk about it. Join a group and talk about it a lot. I paid . . . . to just listen to me talk and that helped me integrate ideas and put things together." To manage the process, a graduate suggested, "Pace yourself and say no to outside activity; no socializing. It is a short term goal. Make deadlines for yourself. Have a support system like another student or family or spouse." A student felt that one should, ". . do something you enjoy. You need to enjoy it. On a personal level, if and when you get your Ph.D. that is not going to make you a different person. But it is a personal opportunity to keep expanding on the areas that you enjoy researching. . . . I did a zillion papers and never found that it really exactly helped me on my dissertation so I think it is a point of maturity where you have something that is really of interest for the dissertation." A graduate had a contrasting point of view regarding papers written for classes and stated that. ". . . pick an area but not necessarily narrowing it down to the topic. . . . start building your bibliography for that area. Don't throw anything away from your first class to your last and don't throw any of your lecture notes away because you may need them for further work with one of your professors; you never know." And, another graduate suggested that. ". . one of the critical pieces for me . . . was I became associated with another student. He was simultaneously or just a step ahead and that was critical for me because he helped to paint the picture and we studied for comps together. There was a real genuine support there, a friendship for sure that will last from this kind of experience. . . . so both to the university and to the new student I think that in any way a collegial support system could be involved is very significant such as a study group or a dissertation group, and some people do this naturally and some other people need a little bit of structure put toward it."

Question 9b

Participants were asked for their recommendations for any revisions of courses or seminars that could facilitate completion of the dissertation. These comments are summarized below.

- **The major recommendation was to include more work on dissertation proposal writing, especially as an addition to the research design course. Design, statistics, and computer courses were described as helpful and should be required. The timing of when courses were to be taken to be most beneficial was discussed by several participants. Omission of certain foundations courses that were described as repetitious of previous work was recommended and other content and research oriented courses should be substituted for them.**

A graduate suggested, ". . . the foundations courses. I believe that those in general repeat courses that you already know when you get into a doctoral level program. Most of the time those students have had those and to take those credit hours if you will and focus some more on the prepping of chapters 1, 2, and 3. Keep the total number of hours the same, you just focus more on the research aspect of it." Another graduate's suggestion was, ". . . . to meet in a group seminar to just talk about the process and to touch base about what was happening because all my course work was great and I had a really good foundation but I wasn't quite sure how to apply it to the dissertation and I think it would have been helpful to me to just have a group to meet with and hear what other people are doing." A graduate stated, "There needs to be a little more time within the research class dealing with form and format of studies in general and the dissertation being one form of that. That format issue might be a little better dealt with in that class." A student suggested that, "More of the group would finish if there was more support for them. In the research design course, schedule a follow-up part 2. Work on an evolving topic and have more structure to move along. Have a basis for working on the dissertation. Timing is important in taking courses. It would be good if you could take the courses as you need them rather than on a fixed schedule." Another student suggested that, ". . . . if I was in charge of programs, I would use more of an internet kind of approach with available resources for the student working on their dissertation. I have found three key people . . . and I think it would be wonderful and I would pay more for this if I knew that DU had linkages to University of _____ and to University of _____ and I could communicate with them, I could work with them and they might be ad hoc advisors for me and we might even have some kind of inter-school agreement whereby if I had a particular interest in [subject] . . . then I had access to

[them]." A student felt that, "There is this one dissertation course . . . . that really proved more frustration than anything else. The process of writing the problem statement and questions and things like that, until you are ready for it, it is just a waste of time. I didn't understand it. . . . I wasn't ready for it and I was just messing around. But, when I was ready, I retook the course." A graduate suggested that, ". . . there is this one hour seminar class with . . . beginning students and there should be one class period that is devoted to the dissertation process and everyone would set a timeline, because everyone gets a different message from a different advisor." Another graduate felt that, "I wanted to be as personally challenged as possible. In fact, ... on my final exam statistics exam, I actually was a little disappointed that it wasn't a little bit harder because I loved it." A graduate suggested that, ". . . . he said go out and see what the legislature is doing and attend some of the sessions. Go to a correctional facility. Go to a psychiatric center. And we interviewed people and he really encouraged us to not just think of our own areas but to connect it to the broader social functioning. It was invaluable." Another graduate suggested that, ". . . some work on the computer and statistics should be required. A student support group would be helpful." And another said, "The very first course I had in methodology, the one that exposed me to all the different designs, that was really valuable as far as I was concerned."

Question 10

The final question to participants was, " Do you have other comments or suggestions of ideas concerning things that were not asked?" These comments are summarized below.

- **Comments repeated previous statements with suggestions for organizing student support groups, assistance in identifying a topic and writing the proposal, and maintaining faculty support throughout the process. Continuing seminars and support after graduation was recommended. The support, assistance, and encouragement of others throughout the dissertation process was a frequent comment. It was recommended that some processes should be "speeded-up" to minimize delays such as the review/protection of human subject review process, etc. The importance of maintaining a quality education program that graduates can be proud of was suggested and the need for additional financial help was stated again.**

A student commented that, ". . . . the human subjects process takes longer than I expected. I've gotten bogged down in that. Another would be a little more emotional support from the advisors would help. . . . the other would be that the process hasn't been as bad as it was made out to be." Another commented, "I wish there was more financial assistance because that has really been a major part of stringing this out. I think it would be helpful if there was some kind of a synthesis of people who have recently completed their doctorate and get some kind of brief summary of this and have some kind of booklet here that people could thumb through the 3 ring notebook and look at what some of the costs were. That would change yearly but it would give you some idea. At least you have some idea of what different ones have cost and then you can say well OK this is what I will do then. This is what I will aim for. . . . . I am very grateful to DU for one of the things that has helped me to get this far and that has been their flexibility and caring of the individual faculty members. They made this do-able." A student preparing a proposal suggested, ". . . . a support group of people who have finished their dissertation available to people who are in the process of completing their dissertation. A group like myself who could meet periodically and say, 'I am having trouble with . . . . and what happened in your case and how did you solve that. . . . it could be a combined group, people who finished and people who haven't and are just sharing their experiences. The idea of a dissertation without walls would be to look across disciplines and departments in the university like for example, I know that there are resources in [other departments]. . . . I am finding that if our goal is to expand knowledge and research I think the time has come for us to do so across academic disciplines. . . . but we are not joining hands and we are not meeting together forward and so I think the idea of a dissertation without walls could also be the idea of not only knowing and advancing within your specific field or research topic but doing so by joining together and benefiting interdependent and interrelated academic disciplines." Another student remarked, "I think faculty are very available. And that was just a wonderful thing. . . . In the College in general I think the faculty are very available to Ph.D. students." Another student commented, "I feel that once this proposal gets done. I am on my way. . . . . I'm not sure where to dig in and once I can see my way clear and get that blueprint down and understand how that follows through and this goes and fits with that, then I'll feel

better. . . . sometimes I get lost in terms of where does all this go anyway and I am honestly not sure at times." A graduate commented, ". . . the only reason I came here, I was so busy with everything else is that DU has been so wonderful to me. This has been a really a very nurturing environment." Another said, "I think the dissertation requirement should be focused on the student's career goals. It should be geared toward their professional goals. It should be something that is reasonable." Another graduate stated, "It is something that not everybody is going to do and is something that not everybody should be allowed to do. So, I appreciate the vigilance of keeping the numbers small enough so you have quality. Quantity means nothing. If everybody could get a Ph.D. then why did I go through this?" A graduate suggested encouragement of, "independent studies. They are open ended and somewhat like a dissertation. You are on your own with your advisor. Study groups should be formed in the College. They provide companionship for students with similar interests." And another suggested that, ". . . . [the university] should be responsible or maybe just [have] a part of the program when you create an end product is to have at least a small network or mechanism to give some follow-up support."

Discussion

Participants seemed to comment freely on their experiences with the dissertation process in terms of the questions presented to each of them. Two factors may have been involved in this process. First of all, many of the participants expressed very positive comments about their dissertation experiences with their advisors, the faculty, and the university. Their willingness to give their time and to openly share their experiences to help us understand the student perspective of this process suggests their positive feelings toward the College. This seems unique to this university program since there is ample literature describing the opposite pattern with students struggling through the dissertation process and having very negative experiences with "the system." However, in this study, there were 13 postcards of the 42 invitations to participate that were not returned and two persons declined to be interviewed. These individuals may not share the same impression of their College experiences, or there may have been personal or time constraints that led to their decision. Their reasons for their lack of interest are unknown.

Secondly, many of the participants knew the interviewer from previous contacts in the College and were aware that he retired from a full time faculty role three years ago. Knowing that he was no longer actively involved in determining the status of any student may have facilitated free expression from students but for graduates, this factor was probably of minimal concern. Participants were aware too, that only the interviewer knew the actual identity of the person associated with any one of the transcriptions. Therefore, the responses presented here represent a valuable summary of the impressions and attitudes of this specific group of individuals. One must note, though, that individuals responding to a faculty member, even if an emeritus faculty, may tend to be less critical of other faculty than if they had been interviewed by a student.

Participants felt that there was more structure and direction associated with courses than with the independent activity required when completing a dissertation. They described the need for self-motivation and self-direction as important attributes to successful completion of their study. These results are consistent with those of empirical studies that found high dependency needs and inability to plan ahead (Stern, 1985), persistence as a coping style (Weiss, 1987), and elements of procrastination including insufficient reinforcement/lack of structure (Muszynski & Akamatsu, 1991) to significantly predict failure or delay in dissertation completion. A number of participants recommended the formation of dissertation support groups to meet regularly to share experiences and solve on-gong problems. Perhaps, these groups could serve to fill the void left in moving from classes which provide structure and peer association to independent dissertation work with an advisor and committee but with no peer interaction. But, there were differences among individuals in their responses. Some preferred the independent activity and described a life style that included this mode of living but others seemed to express a need for group association. There seem to be differences in the manner in which persons value external support and group versus independent problem solving approaches. Students with greater persistence and lower dependency needs may progress satisfactorily on their own.

Content courses and research methodology courses were both felt to be of value in facilitating dissertation completion. But, previous experiences in research and the timing of the courses were variables that affected their perceived value of them. Additional course work in dissertation proposal

writing was frequently recommended. Some participants felt comfortable and challenged in running their own statistical procedures while others contracted with outside consultants for this work. For most, the writing of a dissertation was a new experience in research for which the research methodology courses were their most valued preparation for this event. Creswell and Miller (in press) describe the implications of research methodology selection on students' coursework and doctoral committee selection. Students who are unclear about their methodology, who have insufficient grounding in the methodology, or who select a method beyond the expertise of the available committee may expect pitfalls in their progress.

By the time students reach graduate school, they have had many previous experiences with course assignments and know how to proceed with them. But, dissertations differ from each other in a number of respects such as design, method of analysis, type of problem, etc. It is unlikely that any existing published dissertation procedure will be a precise match for someone's intended study. Each problem under consideration differs and requires its own design and set of procedures. Published guidelines and courses or seminars for completing dissertations are usually general approaches and must be adapted to fit an intended study. This is different from course outlines with very specified assignments that are distributed by an instructor. Developing and implementing a large project independently is not a familiar experience for a student and many of them search for structure or recommend that courses or seminars become available to learn this new independent approach to conducting their own study of a problem area. The process of adapting the content of research methodology courses to a particular study is an integrative process, an attempt to apply information they have learned to their problem area. These are potentially frustrating problems for someone new to independent research and causes one to search for a beginning point, a road map through the process. Institutions wishing to offer support experiences may consult Nerod and Miller's description of the three-day topical interdisciplinary dissertation workships held at the University of California-Berkeley. These workshops bring together faculty and doctoral students from several disciplines who share interest in closely related subjects. The Graduate Division also conducts 5-hour dissertation writing workshops. The dissertation completion rate has increased an average 11% since these prograsms were begun.

Completion of course work and the doctoral final exam and then moving into the stage where one prepares the dissertation proposal is reported to be a major transition point for students. Preparation of a dissertation proposal and its acceptance by the faculty is a major hurdle to be overcome on the path to a doctoral degree. Some students arrive on campus with an idea for a problem that they intend to study, some discover a potential problem as they proceed through courses, and some struggle to identify an acceptable problem area after completing their doctoral exams. At the dissertation proposal stage, the student moves from dependence on course specifications to independence in outlining their own research project. The proposal has been described as a blueprint; one's direction through the study. The advisor's and committee's role is to evaluate the workability of it and to point out technical and procedural flaws that will impact the study. The needed revisions in the proposal and changes seem overwhelming to many but they report a sense of achievement when they reach the point of actually implementing their study. Implementation is often reported as the easiest and most satisfying part of the dissertation process.

Although the stage of implementation of the study was reported as one of the easier parts of the process by many of the students, it was not without some difficulties. Chapters had to be rewritten, sometimes several times. Some reported frustration in getting different recommendations for revisions and changes of chapters from each of their committee members. The search for adequate time to prepare the manuscript was a common endeavor. Students described a number of personal adaptations of their life style to find time to write. Those from off-campus programs had less easy access to faculty and university facilities than on-campus students. This probably extended the time required to complete their study. Students living some distance from campus had to maintain a mail and telephone communication network with their committee. But, having overcome these problems, a number of students reported enjoying sharing the outcomes of their study at the time of their oral exam. It was an enjoyable highlight for them; an opportunity to display their work before a potentially critical audience.

Throughout this process, advisors played a major role in assisting students to complete their dissertation. Turner and Thompson (1993) also found mentoring relationships and general faculty-student interactions to be significantly related to doctoral program success. Advisors were in most cases described as displaying a supportive and positive attitude toward the student; a collegial relationship was

described by some of them. However, there were some student/advisor relationships with problems of misunderstandings, uncertainty of commitments and expectations as well as some cases of unfortunate personal relationship problems. Since the student/advisor/ committee relationship requires a close working relationship, the student's choice of participants was described by them as a critical decision to be made. These relationships can be harmonious as described by many students or they can be filled with misgivings.

Although most participants reported positive experiences with their advisors and committee, the process also requires their own active participation in the process. They are a major player in the student/adviser/committee partnership. Their own personal characteristics and mode of functioning are important components for successful completion of their dissertation. Completion of the dissertation requires a strong personal commitment to the process. Their persistence, time management, personal organization, and external support systems are vital ingredients in making this process successful. They work independently but with faculty over-sight and actively pursue completion of each segment of their study. They overcome barriers, sometimes with faculty assistance. There can be a human tendency to procrastinate and postpone and a tendency to use time and resources ineffectively but most participants understand these hazards and work to minimize them. It is easy to decide to "not do any writing today" or tomorrow or next week or month but one's personal drive and commitment must overcome these tendencies. These are important personal characteristics needed to complete the dissertation.

But graduate students don't live in a vacuum and relate only to their project, although those closest to them may regard this is to be the case at times. In reality, they live in a world with others who can positively or negatively affect the outcome of their study. Faculty and family support systems have usually been described positively, but they can just as well have an adverse effect on the outcome of this process. Working on a dissertation requires adaptation within one's family and time may have to be deliberately reallocated to include both dissertation and family affairs and responsibilities. The usual family activities may become less frequent and budgets may need to be realigned. Germerot (1990) and Wright (1991) both noted the impingement of financial obligations on student progress. Contact with friends and acquaintances may become less frequent for some persons but for others, there may be no

difference in the frequency of social contacts. These changes can lead to certain stresses and sometimes to conflicting goals which may or may not be negotiable. Several years of doctoral study can significantly deplete one's financial resources unless there is external funding to defray these costs. Having to do without and having to postpone needed purchases can impact family harmony. The costs for tuition and those related to data gathering and analysis often reach a four figure amount. It is important to view the total picture of the personal and financial costs of completing a dissertation, not just an isolated segment of it.

Upon completion of their degree, graduates felt a sense of pride and of significant achievement. This was reflected in their performance at their dissertation oral exams and in their relationship with others. Generally, others showed greater respect and recognition for the graduate who earned their degree but some showed no recognition or seemed threaten by it. Completion of the degree gave graduates greater credibility with their colleagues and in their relationship with others. The expressions of others demonstrated this impression of respect.

The recommendations of participants to others who are beginning the dissertation were of value in that they reflected their successful and the not-so-successful experiences through the dissertation process. Their major recommendations summarized the experiences of participants. That is, a newcomer to the dissertation process should select a problem area early and begin work on the study as soon as possible. They need a strong support system and committee and need to organize themselves and their environment to expedite the process. Persistence, good communication with their committee, and well managed allocation of time were recommended. Finances must be closely monitored and additional financial aid would be desirable. One's major goals must be targeted and one must persist toward it without being distracted by external events. These traits are important in any endeavor but particularly in progressing through the dissertation process.

In most cases, course work was regarded as helpful in progressing through the dissertation. The research courses were frequently mentioned as useful but more work on dissertation proposal writing was recommended. This might be included in research courses or as seminars/workshops at the appropriate time in a student's program. Discussions, samples of proposals, and written outlines as hand-outs could

be included in the course. Some doctoral course work was felt to be repetitious of earlier work in the foundations area and should be deleted to allow for more time to be devoted to research strategies. In most cases, doctoral candidates have already had courses in educational foundations and in human development through their undergraduate or masters degree programs.

Participants stressed the need for student support groups and strongly recommended additional assistance in preparing the proposal. Faculty support and the support of others was viewed as critically important. Even support and consultation after graduation was suggested. This might be on a personal or group basis and represents ongoing professional development. Faculty were viewed as generally available and supportive throughout the process. Most participants progressed through "the system" satisfactorily but there were some suggestions for changes such as the provision of greater flexibility in selection of dissertation topic and in the selection and availability of resource persons who might be contacted for their expertise in an area. Provision of additional financial support for students was also an important recommendation since the additional costs for tuition and research related expenses impact one's requirements for basic living expenses.

These comments reflect the impressions and recommendations of a selected sample of students and graduates of a doctoral program in education. There is substantial consistency in their responses along with some unique impressions from individuals suggesting that these are not unusual experiences of dissertation writers. These impressions represent the student perspective of the process; something that faculty need to be aware of in working with students on their dissertations. It would be of interest to repeat this study to identify the "faculty perspective" in working with students on their dissertations and contrast the two areas. These comments provide implications for a review of College procedures and guidelines concerning the dissertation process and potential changes that include recommendations from participants in this study.

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Table 1

Distribution of Potential Interview Candidates Contacted for Participation

Concentration	Students		Graduates		Total
	Male	Female	Males	Females	
Counseling Psychology	2	3	1	2	8
Curriculum Leadership		4	1	4	9
Educational Psychology	2	3		9	14
Higher Educ. Administration		1		3	4
School Administration	1	1	2	3	7
Total	5	12	4	21	42

Table 2
Distribution of Interview Participants by Concentration

Concentration	Students		Graduates		Total
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
Counseling Psychology	1	1	1	1	4
Curriculum Leadership		3	1	2	6
Educational Psychology		3		2	5
Higher Educ. Administration				2	2
School Administration	1		2	2	5
Total	2	7	4	9	22

Table 3

Disposition of Interview Candidates

Candidates Interviewed	22
Postcards Not Returned	13
Declined to be Interviewed	2
Letter Returned, Wrong Address	5
Total	42

Appendix A

Structured Interview Statements - Graduates:

Introductory Statements: Thank you for participating in this interview. etc. etc.

1. To begin our discussion, tell me how you viewed the dissertation process. What are some of your impressions of the difference between taking and passing courses vs. working on and passing the dissertation work?

Prompts (if needed):

- What were some of the highlights of your course work. How did course work facilitate your dissertation work?
- What information did you have about preparing a dissertation before beginning work on it and how did you use this to prepare yourself for the experience?

2. From the beginning to the end of the dissertation process, think about transition points that enabled you to move from step to step or that might have been a problem for you. Describe these transition points for me. The steps in transition might be topic selection, work on the proposal., proposal acceptance, finding a sample, collection of data, data analysis, writing chapters, literature review, the oral exam, etc.

3. What was the hardest part of the dissertation process? How did you overcome these difficulties? The easiest part? What did you enjoy most about the process? enjoy the least?

4. There are many reasons that determine whether one finishes the dissertation. What do you think are some of your own personal characteristics that might have facilitated or hindered progress for you? Why do you think you finished when some others have had the opposite experience? Did you develop any new or unique strategies that enabled you to finish?

5. It has often been reported that working on a doctoral degree and especially working on a dissertation results in changes in one's life patterns, at least for the duration. Do you think this impacted your social life and relationship with friends and acquaintances?

Prompts (if needed)

- In what way did this change for you?
- How did you adapt to this change?
- Did your role as a "scholar" change anything in you relationship with others?

6. Another frequently reported change involves adaptations within one's family. Would you tell me about the kinds of adaptations you and your family made while the dissertation was in process?

Prompts (if needed)

- What were some of the stressors?
- Support provided by the family?
- Differences in stresses associated with course work or internships?

7. To the extent that you care to describe this, what was involved financially in completing your dissertation? How did this differ from costs involved in completing course work? What were some "indirect costs" for you such as your time, changes from your usual activities, etc.?

Prompts (if needed)

- Work obligations? use of savings? loans?
- Costs of typing, postage, printing, binding, phone, etc.?

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8. Would you tell me about your relationship with your advisor and committee? In what way were they helpful and what were some of the stressors? How was this different from the traditional teacher-student relationship that you were used to?

Prompts (if needed)

- Availability of advisor? timing of appointments?
- Return of drafts? usefulness of comments and suggestions?
- Support and interest in your work?

9. What specific recommendations would you make to a student just beginning their doctoral work? Beginning the dissertation process? Are there admissions criteria that the Graduate Admissions Committee should consider that may be indicators of difficulty in preparing a dissertation? Do you have any recommendations for revisions of courses and/or seminars that the faculty should consider to prepare you better for the dissertation?

10. What other comments would you like to make regarding your experiences with the dissertation or in regard to this project? Are there ideas that you would like to add that I didn't ask you about?

Thank you for your participation in this project. etc. etc.

Structured Interview Statements - Students

Introductory Statements: Thank you for participating in this interview. etc. etc.

1. To begin our discussion, tell me how you viewed the dissertation process. What are some of your impressions of the difference between taking and passing courses vs. working on and passing the dissertation oral exam?

Prompts (if needed)

- What were some of the highlights of your course work? In what way did course work facilitate your dissertation work?
- What information did you have about preparing a dissertation before beginning work on it and how did you use this to prepare yourself for the experience?

2. From the beginning to the end of the dissertation process, think about transition points that enabled you to move from step to step or that might have been a problem for you. Describe these transition points for me. The steps in transition might be topic selection, work on the proposal, proposal acceptance, finding a sample, collection of data, data analysis, writing chapters, literature review, the oral exam, etc.

3. What was the hardest part of the dissertation process? How did you overcome these difficulties? the easiest part? What did you enjoy most about the process? enjoy the least?

4. There are many reasons that determine whether one finishes the dissertation. What do you think are some of your own personal characteristics that facilitate or hinder progress for you? Why do you think that some have finished their dissertations but you continue to pursue completion of your study? What new or unique strategies are you using to enable you to finish your study.

5. It has often been reported that working on a doctoral degree and especially working on a dissertation results in changes in one's life patterns, at least for the duration. Do you think that this has impacted your social life and relationships with friends and acquaintances?

Prompts (if needed)

- In what way did this change for you?
- How did you adapt to this change?
- Did your role as a "scholar" change anything in your relationship with others?

6. Another frequently reported change involves adaptations within one's family. Would you tell me about the kinds of adaptations you and your family are making while you are working on the dissertation?

Prompts (if needed)

- What are some of the stressors?
- Family support? who? when?
- Differences in stresses of the dissertation vs. stresses of course work or internship?

7. To the extent that you care to describe this, what is involved financially in completing your dissertation? How does this differ from costs involved in completing courses? What were some "indirect costs" such as your time, changes from your usual activities, etc.?

Prompts (if needed)

- Work obligations? use of savings? loans?
  Costs of typing? postage? binding? phone? etc.

8. Would you tell me about your relationship with your advisor and committee? In what way are they helpful and what are some of the stressors? How was this different from the traditional teacher-student relationship that you are used to?

Prompts (if needed)

- Availability of advisor? timing of appointments?
- Return of drafts? usefulness of comments and suggestions?
- Support and interest in your study?

9. What specific recommendations would you make to a student just beginning their doctoral study? just beginning the dissertation process? Are there admissions criteria that the Graduate Admissions Committee should consider that may be indicators of difficulty in preparing the dissertation. Do you have any recommendations for revisions of courses and/or seminars that the faculty should consider to prepare you better for the dissertation?

10. What other comments would you like to make regarding your experiences with the dissertation or in regard to this project? Are there ideas that you would like to add that I didn't ask you about?

Thank you for your participation. etc. etc.